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Moral Self-Knowledge in Kantian Ethics

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Abstract Kant's duty of self-knowledge demands that one know one's heart—the quality of one's will in relation to duty. Self-knowledge requires that an agent subvert feelings which fuel self-aggrandizing narratives and increase self-conceit; she must adopt the standpoint of the rational agent constrained by the requirements of reason in order to gain information about her moral constitution. This is not I argue, contra Nancy Sherman, in order to assess the moral goodness of her conduct. Insofar as sound moral practice requires moral self-knowledge and moral self-knowledge requires a theoretical commitment to a conception of the moral self, sound moral agency is for Kant crucially tied to theory. Kant plausibly holds that self-knowledge is a protection against moral confusion and self-deception. I conclude that although his account relies too heavily on the awareness of moral law to explain its connection to moral development, it is insightful and important in Kantian ethics.

Keywords Self-knowledge · Kant · Self-deception · Duty · Casuistry

One of the most interesting and perhaps most under-appreciated features of Kant's ethical theory is its recognition of the psychological complexity of human beings. While he doesn't always get the details right Kant is not psychologically naive; he recognizes that judgements concerning the rightness of actions are vulnerable to corruption from self-interested inclination. An action one initially takes to be a duty can, under the sway of internal narratives, too quickly lose that appearance. For example, it seems clear that I ought to help Ted as he tries to open his office door, balancing a load of books and steaming mug of coffee, until I notice that I'll miss the elevator if I do so and then suddenly I see that I have no such duty to Ted who, after all, would never go out of his way for me. My concern here is not to claim that there is a perfect duty to ensure that struggling academics get safely into their offices, but instead to draw attention to the manner in which the purported duty lost this status. That Ted's inconsiderate behavior should become

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relevant just as I realize that I'll be slowed down, should make us suspicious. Kant is keenly aware of this sort of psychological tendency and its significance for the development of moral character; his account of the duty of self-knowledge is intended as a partial remedy.

That Kant has a sophisticated moral psychology will come as a surprise to some who disparage his view as that of a rule fetishist offering an unpalatably simplistic account of the good person (for example, Williams 1981).[1] But while Kant defends the moral law as the arbiter of right action, and dutiful action as the moral exemplar, he does not neglect the psychological difficulties of getting things right. In contrast to Aristotle, who is often upheld as one of the philosophers most sensitive to the psychological features of sound moral agency, Kant's moral psychology is in some respects more complete. Kant does not take for granted the accuracy of our judgements about ourselves. Aristotle's advice that we should track our tendencies to miss the mean of virtue and aim toward excess or defect in order to correct the imbalance of our natural tendencies and thereby hit the mean, for example, presupposes the self-knowledge about which Kant is concerned. Moral self-development requires, at least in some cases, that one start with an accurate assessment of one's motives for action.

According to Kant, to gain self-knowledge an agent must subvert the feelings which fuel self-aggrandizing narratives and increase self-conceit; she must see herself from the standpoint of the rational agent constrained by the requirements of reason in order to gain information about her moral constitution. This is not I will argue, contra Nancy Sherman, in order to assess the moral goodness of her conduct. Insofar as moral practice requires moral self-knowledge and moral self-knowledge requires a theoretical commitment to a conception of the moral self, moral agency is for Kant crucially tied to theory. By keeping duty in mind we can, Kant plausibly holds, avoid certain forms of moral confusion and self-conceit. Moral self-knowledge is a form of self-awareness disciplined by theory in which the theoretical foundation of Kantian ethics, respect for autonomy, provides a focus for and constraint on an agent's self-observation. As such moral self-knowledge is a form of practice regulated by theory.

1 Kant on Self-Knowledge

Because Kant holds that the good will alone is good without qualification, it is theoretically important to his position that agents become better at willing. Moral progress on such a view amounts to the purification of the will over time and for this purpose self-knowledge is crucial. Of the duties to oneself as a moral being, the first command is to self-knowledge:

> This command is "*know* (scrutinize, fathom) *yourself*," not in terms of your natural perfection (your fitness or unfitness for all sorts of optional or even commanded ends) but rather in terms of your moral perfection in relation to your duty. That is, know your heart—whether it is good or evil, whether the source of your actions is pure or impure (Kant 1991, AK 6:441)

The taxonomy of duties supplied by the *The Metaphysics of Morals* adopts the standard division of ethical duties (or duties of virtue) into duties to self and duties to others. Perfect duties are those that require specific actions and, in their fulfillment, allow for no latitude in the interests of inclination; failure to perform a perfect duty is blameworthy. Imperfect duties require that a certain end be adopted and allow for latitude regarding the actions

[1] For a decisive counter argument to Williams's claim about the role of duty in Kantian moral psychology see Herman (1993).

taken to satisfy the end; their performance is meritorious. Some duties demand of an agent that she adopt a particular end, an end which is also a duty; these are duties of virtue (Kant 1991, AK 6:383). Duties of virtue are wide duties, meaning roughly that they cannot be fully specified and there is some discretion in complying with the duty, "that is, the law cannot specify precisely in what way one is to act and how much one is to do by the action for an end that is also a duty" (Kant 1991, AK 6:390). Wide duties do not give permission to avoid doing what one ought, but merely permit the limitation of one maxim of duty by another; to clarify this point Kant gives the example of love of one's neighbor being limited by love of one's parents. All ethical duties must be thought of as wide because they impose rational constraints only by promoting an end as a required end, not by imposing a law concerning a particular action (Kant 1991, AK 6:410). The happiness of others is an end that is also a duty, but Kantian agents themselves must decide whose happiness to promote, when and how much. As Allen Wood (1999, p. 148) notes, because the fulfilment of one's duties demands discretion and the exercise of judgement it is free rational beings, not the taxonomy of duties, that are ultimately responsible for decisions about how to live and for the shape that a particular life takes.

The duty of moral self-knowledge (the duty to know one's heart) is a wide duty to seek moral perfection. Fundamental to moral practice, Kant claims that:

> moral self-knowledge will, first dispel *fanatical* contempt for oneself as man (for the whole human race), since this contradicts itself.... such knowledge will also counteract that *egotistical* self-esteem which takes mere wishes—wishes that, however ardent, always remain empty of deeds—for proof of a good heart.... Impartiality in appraising oneself in comparison with the law, and sincerity in acknowledging to oneself one's inner moral worth or lack of worth are duties to oneself that follow directly from this first command of self-knowledge (1991, AK 6:441–2).

As is familiar from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, there is a problem knowing the true nature of the self. This raises an epistemological problem for Kant (discussed by Kitcher 1984, and Ameriks 2000, among others) that I will not address in this paper, although I note that some of the current literature on self-knowledge touches on Kantian themes (for example, Moran 2001 and Boyle 2009). Kant is clear that we cannot know with certainty what our will is like: "The real morality of actions, their merit or guilt, even that of our own conduct, thus remains entirely hidden from us" (Kant 1965, AK 552*a*). Our moral assessments cannot refer to our noumenal selves, but only to our empirical character, about which no truly accurate judgements can be made. Interestingly, the epistemological problem doesn't seem to settle the issue for Kant himself who neither renounces the search for self-knowledge, nor suggests that it is without point. The problem of uncertainty about the constitution of one's will derives not only from Kant's metaphysical two worlds view but also from his doubts about the human capacity to come to know human nature. In Kant's later ethical writings, where he explicitly develops a practical anthropology some of the difficulties involved in having accurate self-perceptions are discussed.[2]

One of Kant's (2006, AK 7:121) concerns is that humans tend to conceal themselves once aware of being observed: "If a human being notices that someone is observing him and trying to study him, he will either appear embarrassed (self-conscious) and cannot show himself as he really is; or he dissembles, and does not want to be shown as he is." When

[2] This raises the issue (which I will not here discuss) of how to reconcile Kant's earlier *a priori* "pure" ethics with his later "impure"ethics or practical anthropology. For an extended discussion see Louden (2000).

observed by another person I want to represent myself in a certain light and so make myself artificial. Hence, observations of people will not reliably produce knowledge of what humans are like. In the first person our attempts at knowledge are similarly complicated. When we observe ourselves: "Without noticing what we are doing, we suppose we are discovering within us what we ourselves have put there" (Kant 2006, AK 7:133). To observe human nature as it really is we would have to observe behavior that is unself-conscious and this is not possible because civilization makes us vulnerable to the opinion of others and thus self-conscious. Self-scrutiny is needful but uncertain.

Self-knowledge is further complicated by the fact that our minds are not internally luminous; the contents of our heart are not openly on display. Some of our ideas are obscure and we can only be indirectly conscious of them, others are distinct (Kant 2006, AK 7:135).[3] Cognitive skills are needed in order to develop objectivity and to become conscious of such representations. Kant (2006, AK 7:131) writes specifically about the important skill of abstracting (a highly advanced cognitive ability to refrain from acknowledging some aspect of a representation) which demonstrates freedom of thought and authority of the mind because in abstracting one's representations are under one's control. Kant's own example of abstraction (a suitor who could make a good marriage if able to overlook his beloved's physical imperfection) perhaps trivializes an important point. The power to abstract away from a feature of a representation and to conceive of it otherwise is a power to see things with objectivity. He describes (2006, AK 7:131–132) this cognitive ability as "a strength of mind that can only be acquired through practice" and is clearly aware of the subtle ways in which our consciousness can be influenced and, with diligence, refined. Human action is complicated by these facts about our mental lives and Kant's discussion of self-knowledge acknowledges the reality of the human predicament (a point recognized by O'Neill 1989).

Kant's writings on the topic of self-knowledge are extremely brief and arguably overly concerned with our capacity to see ourselves in a good light. What of self-loathing and its power to produce moral confusion? While Kant explicitly writes about servility as a form of moral failure he never seems to connect it to self-loathing. And why does Kant suppose that self-awareness in relation to duty has the purifying effect that he suggests it does? We may be left wondering how to satisfy the duty of self-knowledge: what is the meaning of the command 'know yourself in terms of your moral perfection in relation to your duty' and how is this knowledge likely to dispel self-contempt and to counteract egotistical self-esteem? What Kant says directly on the issue of self-knowledge does not settle the issue and so to settle the issue we need to ask what is most in tone with the larger purpose of his ethical theory.

In order for self-knowledge to be possible at all, there must be some kind of evidence concerning our moral motives that can be trusted, lest the duty of self-knowledge be impossible to fulfill. One intuitive possibility is that the evidence of the source of one's action as pure or impure lies in the ease and transparency with which they are done. Because according to Kant, the virtuously disposed person finds pleasure in dutiful action, it could be argued that the feelings that coincide with action from duty constitute evidence

[3] Cases of sense perceptions of which we are not aware, but whose existence we can infer, are cases of obscure ideas (this form of idea makes, for example, sexual repression possible). Kant notes: "we are often enough the victims of obscure ideas which are reluctant to vanish even when understanding has thrown light upon them. To arrange for his grave in his garden or under a shady tree, in a field or in a dry plot of ground, is often a very important affair to a dying man, even though he knows that if he chooses the one, he has no reason to hope for a nice view; and if he chooses the other, he has no reason to worry about catching a cold." (2006, AK 7: 136–137).

of a pure heart. In what follows I evaluate this strategy for interpreting self-knowledge and argue that it fails because it introduces the dangerously evaluative notion of moral merit. By showing how the assessment of the goodness of one's character is anathema to self-knowledge I make a case for an alternative interpretation according to which self-knowledge is not evaluative, but descriptive. The attitude expressed in self-knowledge is not to serve as a support for further judgements about one's moral merit, as the desire for this sort of moral self-evaluation is likely to be morally corrupt. The moral point of self-knowledge is to help to avoid self-illusion and to develop moral objectivity. I go on to argue that while Kant's duty of self-knowledge draws our attention to an important part of moral practice and demonstrates a sophisticated awareness of the possibilities for moral evasion and self-deception, it remains unclear his position has the resources to fully explain how knowing one's heart improves one's will.

2 Self-Knowledge as Therapy

According to Nancy Sherman (1993) the Kantian duty of self-knowledge, which she describes as a kind of therapy through which one develops self-understanding and guards against self-deception, plays a role in determining the goodness of actions themselves. She claims that in knowing one's heart one knows one's motives, one's practical stance in action, and so knows whether one's action is good as well as right. Focusing on the nature of wide duties themselves, Sherman argues that because wide duties include a discretionary component, the assessment of their satisfaction cannot be understood without an appeal to the quality of the agent's willing. Her analysis brings together the prescriptive question "what should be done?" and the evaluative question of whether one's maxim has moral worth in a particular case. The quality of one's will can be gleaned by attending to the quality of one's practical stance in action and hence, Sherman concludes (p.60), the assessment of the quality of one's motives is crucial for Kant and cannot be separated from "the actual evaluation of cases and the selection of salient features."

Sherman's interpretation of self-knowledge is part of an argument intended to show that Kant does speak to the moral questions that occupied the ancients, such as whether or not one is living well; she wants to show that Kantian ethics is concerned with the goodness of lives and actions and attempts to do so by making the assessment of an agent's motive in acting part of the assessment of the action. Because for Kant virtue is an internal state of the agent and not an external target to be hit, knowledge of the internal state is essential to the evaluation of the actions to which they give rise. Contrasting Kant and Aristotle, Sherman notes that because Kant makes virtue an internal state of the agent, while Aristotle makes it an external target to be hit, Kant's position, although often taken to be insensitive to context, actually allows for more discretionary room than does Aristotle's—for Aristotle there is a single correct answer about how to get it right, while for Kant there is play room.

Sherman defends this claim by arguing that motives provide the connection between the policy expressed in one's action and the values and interests that the agent brings to bear in deliberation. Because duties of virtue are wide duties their satisfaction requires discernment; in any particular case motive supplies the needed connection between a maxim as a general policy for action and recognition that this particular case is one to which the general policy applies: "For the Kantian, acting virtuously requires knowing not merely that the motive of duty ought to be a sufficient incentive, but that it is here and now—that the requirement is satisfied in this case, that one is motivated by practical interest."(p. 49). Sherman concludes that virtue, although an internal state for Kant, is a state one can know;

judging oneself in accord with the moral law amounts to a practical strategy for a "therapy of self-knowledge".

To make her case Sherman has us consider an example in which a general policy against lying is, through a kind of internal dialectic, clarified as her principle for action in a way that brings the agent's interests and values to light in deliberation and allows for an assessment of character by exposing the agent's higher order principles. Briefly, a daughter considers lying to her terminally ill mother who has not been told about the short time she has left. Does benevolence require lying, sparing the Mother fear and anxiety? Will the lie, if told, be manageable? If her Mom finds out will she be insulted and hurt? Through this set of deliberations, Sherman suggests, the Kantian agent comes to consider not just what her Mom wants, but the dignity of her agency and the possible mistreatment of that agency. She arrives at a judgement about what she ought to do that is informed by what she cares about and it is these motives upon which an assessment of the goodness of her actions depends.

Sherman recognizes that self-knowledge is a delicate project and suggests that although self-knowledge is fragile and easily perverted, we have evidence that we are getting close to truly virtuous action when we find pleasure in doing our duty. As Kant himself writes (1998, AK 6:25): "a heart joyous in the *compliance* with its duty (not just a complacency in the *recognition* of it) is the sign of genuineness in virtuous disposition." Pleasure in doing one's duty is a sign of virtue, it indicates that one is responding lovingly to the moral law, rather than hating or fearing it. According to Sherman (1993, p. 58) this shows that one can track one's moral progress in part through awareness of the feelings that coincide with being moved by the moral law: "Kant suggests that pleasure, and the affective aspect of character, may be our best indication of the motive of reason." So we know that our will is good when we find pleasure in dutiful action; this provides a standard according to which we can make judgements about the moral goodness of actions and character because, according to Sherman, we know that we have *hit the mark* in such cases.

3 The Object of Self-Knowledge

Sherman's rather Aristotelian reading of Kant is subtle and insightful and I want here only to take issue with its focus on the assessment of good actions and character. Sherman takes maxims to be general policies with varying degrees of specificity; a very general maxim will be made more specific as required by context. Because one's sense of context is informed by one's character, maxim specification will be influenced by one's motives. The goodness of one's action, she claims, depends upon an assessment of the motives which shape it. For Sherman, duty and virtue come together in the assessment of the goodness of character that is part of practical deliberation. While she is right that there is moral point in keeping "a conscientious vigil of what our maxims are" (p. 45), this is not so that we may make moral judgements about our own virtue (judgements grounded in moral feelings which can mislead). Insofar as her interpretation of the value of Kantian self-knowledge encourages us to bring claims about our motives into an *assessment* of the quality of our actions (judgements of moral goodness) it potentially blocks the achievement of self-knowledge in ways about which Kant explicitly worried.

Sherman's example is supposed to show that the agent's motives shape her understanding of what she is doing and what she ought to do. This seems true and speaks to the need for honesty in deliberation. But honesty or transparency in deliberation is largely what is at issue in the attainment of self-knowledge and so Sherman's further claim (p. 53) that the focus on motives in deliberation can "help us assess character and its

goodness" should make us wary. Knowledge of what one is like in relation to duty is knowledge of a fact about me but is not meant to be a measure of my goodness. Kant's worry that in self-observation we are prone to discover a self which we have invented for our own appraisal is a caution against the assessment of our own goodness. Self-conceit should be wiped out entirely, not carefully cultivated. The illusion of good in ourselves, he writes (2006, AK 7:153), "must be wiped out without exemption, and the veil by which self-love conceals our moral defects must be torn away." Positive illusions about our own goodness have the power to delude and deceive us, causing us to fail to meet our moral duties.

Kant seems to think that by keeping duty in mind we can prevent subtle forms of moral confusion and moral narcissism. He cautions (1997a, AK 5:85) against moral enthusiasm, claiming that enthusiasts have lost track of their obligations because they have corrupted their character with pathological incentives and grandiose self-conceptions. Those overcome by "moral enthusiasm" (such as religious fanatics) are prone to exaggerated self-conceit and the delusion that something other than the moral law makes the act obligatory; their concern with moral merit distracts them from their obligation.[4] Kant's focus on dutiful action is, in part, a safeguard against this sort of moral confusion.

Ascertaining just what duty requires involves judgement, a necessary part of moral deliberation, in order to determine how a maxim is to be applied in a particular case, and casuistry is part of Kant's practical methodology for determining this. According to Kant (1991, AK 6:441), casuistry is a practice in how to seek truth: "Casuistry is, accordingly, neither a *science* nor a part of science; for in that case it would be dogmatics, and casuistry is not so much a doctrine about how *to find* something as rather a practice in how *to seek* truth." In the casuistical questions of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant asks for example, whether a policy against lying rules out speaking an untruth from mere politeness. While his use of this method is not applied consistently (he sometimes offers confident but dubious answers to these questions and sometimes does not) we can see that the point of the questions is to open up a variety of maxims and contexts for consideration and to subject them to the categorical imperative, not to retreat to one's inner states for confirmation of what one is *really* doing. Kant, we have seen, is suspicious of the reliability of this sort of psychological manouevre.

This suggests that a preoccupation with what I am *really* doing will potentially lead me to ignore salient alternatives. The casuistical method aims at opening up a variety of possibilities for evaluation and failure to consider these possibilities makes it less likely that I will be guided by the morally relevant features of the situation. In moral deliberation a focus on the quality of one's will interferes with the moral project of judging what is required. If my attention is aimed at uncovering what I am *really* doing, how I am internally determined, I am subtly distracted from obligation by moral self-evaluation. At this stage in moral deliberation analysis of my true motives too easily slides into the question what is *making* me do what I am doing, since I am implicitly attempting to determine the shape of my freedom and internal narratives about my virtues and vices too readily come to mind. The point of casuistry is to render me more objective and to avoid the confusion such narratives can create by realizing how inclinations might be determining my action and by focusing me on the requirements that the situation is placing on my will.

[4] Moral fanatics base their reason for action on a pathological incentive and produce "a frivolous, high-flown, fantastic cast of mind, flattering themselves with a spontaneous goodness of heart that needs neither spur nor bridle and for which not even a command is necessary and thereby forgetting their obligation, which they ought to think of rather than merit."

Returning to Sherman's example, we may wonder whether it gets the aim of casuistry wrong; the point is not to find out *what you care about* but to see what the moral law demands. We can grant that the daughter's motives or interests will influence the very questions that occur to her, as well as her answers to them, but reject Sherman's further suggestion that the project of self-knowledge itself involves an assessment of goodness (of character and action) that involves an evaluation of these motives. My claim is not that there is no room for an assessment of the goodness of character in Kantian ethics, but rather that self-knowledge is not the place for it. For good reason Kant is incredibly cautious about evaluative self-scrutiny; we are easily distracted from our obligations, from giving others and ourselves the respect owed to rational beings.

The value of self-knowledge does not lie in a determination of why I did what I did—whether or not the motive I *ultimately* acted on was pure. My motives must be seen in light of the requirements of duty *not* so that I may evaluate my moral quality (which Kant prohibits) but so that I may develop the cognitive skills required for moral objectivity and so that I do the right thing. It is one thing to know that something is true of me and quite another to take that fact as an evaluative judgement about me. Kant wants us to steer clear of this sort of evaluation and it is important to see that this is not in tension with his demand that we should know ourselves in relation to duty. He is not proposing that self-knowledge is knowledge of one's merit; it is rather knowledge of what one is like, in relation to merit. Duty is simply the background theory through which the information is filtered. In self-knowledge, duty is more like a window through which we look than a mirror we use to make a judgement about the quality of our reflection. For example, if I know that I have certain tendencies to pride or pleasure then this knowledge enables me to select casuistical possibilities which will reveal, and may rule of out play, those tendencies. In this sort of case knowing what I am like puts me on guard. But the object of my knowledge is my mental states, not my mental states as I know them to be indicators of my moral quality.

In order to see the importance of this distinction consider an example discussed by Richard Moran (2001, pp. 174–5) of a married, family man who spends an evening at a nightclub with a woman from work. He describes himself in his reflections, as he sneaks back home, as "feeling a tremendous rakehell, and not liking myself much for it, and feeling rather a good chap for not liking myself much for it, and not liking myself at all for feeling rather a good chap." He is feeling bad about feeling good about feeling bad. Reflecting on his shameful behavior leads him to feel good, after all, he is the kind of guy who feels shame for such things—but on further reflection this doesn't seem right. In Moran's analysis of the case what goes wrong in the rakehell's self-awareness is, in one sense, that it moves too quickly from the object of the intentional state (his shameful behavior) to the state of being ashamed which is then treated as an assessable psychological phenomenon.[5] A failure of duty is transformed, through the lens of self-evaluation into a weakness of character, a kind of moral self-indulgence. What seems to matter to the rakehell in his reflections is not that he failed to meet an acknowledged moral standard but that his displeasure at this failure is an indication of his moral quality and that he feels the right amount of shame. His negative self-judgement is a source of satisfaction to him and so the situation is for him, in a sense, resolved because he feels bad about it. The rakehell suffers from a kind of tortured self-love, a preoccupation with himself that undermines the

[5] Moran writes: "The rakehell as described seems to attempt a relation to his original shame, which does not involve viewing the world through it (in this case, himself and his actions), but instead treats it as an opaque psychological fact about himself that he *has* this attitude, a fact from which he can draw certain conclusions—conclusions which in this case conflict with the original attitude itself" p. 188.

moral task: *Did I fail*? *Was it major? With what sorts of shame must I pay?*. In knowing himself to be a rakehell he excuses himself and treats his freedom (to continue to be a rakehell) as a kind of determination (*I'm just like that*). The move beyond bare self-awareness to the assessment of one's character on the basis of this self-awareness is dangerous as it points us in the wrong direction. The project of self-knowledge has gone off the rails in just the way Kant (ever-worried about our tendencies to self-love) might have predicted. In sum, the rakehell provides an illustration of the weakness of the initially intuitively plausible view that the feelings that coincide with dutiful action can constitute evidence of a good heart.

4 Moral Self-Knowledge as Self-Awareness Disciplined by Theory

The duty to know one's heart is explicitly a duty to know oneself in terms of one's moral perfection *in relation* to duty; the practical project of self-knowledge demands that the theoretical ground of Kant's ethical theory be kept clearly in focus. Kant wants us to avoid an investigation of moral motives that might lead us to focus on whether our actions were truly virtuous, whether the moral target was hit, or whether we were in fact humiliated by the moral law, or loved our duty; these are all invitations to self-deception and heteronomy. Self-knowledge, I am suggesting, is a cognitive capacity developed by keeping the theoretical foundation of Kantian ethics in mind. The theoretical foundation is used as a kind of compass which allows the agent to locate herself in the moral landscape; the focus on duty is a guard against self-deception. Kant claims that this practice will diminish the human tendency to dis-value persons and will counteract egotistical self-esteem. By insisting that my heart be compared with the moral law, not with members of my community or my former or future self, Kant indicates that the value of self-knowledge lies in the practical knowledge gained through a steadfast commitment to understanding my actions in light of the theoretical basis for dutiful action.

Kant's persistent demand that our moral judgements regarding both self and others be made *in relation to duty* suggests that he found there to be something very important in that form of disciplined thought. This is clear in his discussion of moral comparisons with others which we are urged not to make; they too can lead to self-deception and have deleterious effects on our character. Kant decries moral comparisons with others not only because such judgements may not be adequately informed, but rather because in making such comparisons we are also prone to self-conceit. Moreover, we may judge ourselves to be better than others but if we are only better than the worst, our judgement is not entirely correct. Kant (1997b, AK 27: 349) advises that moral humility comes from comparing oneself only with the moral law: "moral self-esteem, which is founded on the worth of humanity, must never be based on a comparison with others, but only on comparison with the moral law itself." The theoretical basis for obligation is respect for rational agency and in Kant's prohibition on moral comparisons with others we can see him drawing our attention back to this by making salient the fact of the other's autonomy. As Wood (1999, p. 138) notes, when Kant prohibits moral comparisons with others he is again returning our attention to duty, suggesting that "human dignity, properly understood, rules out the very idea of any comparison or competition regarding self-worth." In the first person human dignity, properly understood, involves recognition of the moral law, not an evaluation of the goodness of my character and action.

Kant's insistence that we compare ourselves with the moral law is, in effect, a way of putting limits on self-assessment; the standard by which we are to understand what we are

doing is simply the standard of duty. By limiting our focus in this way we are prevented from making certain moral missteps and are developing a form of disciplined thought that will increase our objectivity. Moral self-knowledge is an aid to moral objectivity because by framing our self-study through the requirements of duty we make it less likely that we will discover within us what we have put there, for the strict constraint on observation leaves little room for moral self-projection. This is important because our identities are bound up in our values in deep and complicated ways, as has been shown by Korsgaard (1996).

Kant is clearly aware of how the emergence of a civilized state, in which people have developed characters in which they take pride and seek to protect, is to some large degree due to the transformation (some would say, sublimation) of self-love into a civilized form. Kant's bleak view of human nature is at times unsettling. He writes (1998, AK 6:33) that he need not supply a proof of the evil in human nature, for we have a multitude of examples, and that we should not be misled into thinking that our civilized state is free of such evil:

> If we are however disposed to the opinion that we can have a better cognition of human nature known in its civilized state (where its predispositions can be more fully developed), we must then hear out a long melancholy litany of charges against humankind—of secret falsity even in the most intimate friendship, so that a restraint on trust in the mutual confidence of even the best friends is reckoned a universal maxim of prudence in social dealings; of a propensity to hate him to whom we are indebted, to which a benefactor must always heed; of a hearty goodwill that nonetheless admits the remark that 'in the misfortunes of our best friends there is something that does not altogether displease us'; and of many other vices yet hidden under the appearance of virtue.

Although overstated, the essence of his point is undeniable and has application beyond his own theory. My beloved identity as a patriot, or public benefactor, or professional is itself a structure through which I understand and value myself and which may contain secret vices and prejudices that I will be inclined to keep myself from discovering. Kant is right, I think, to guard against self-deception and right to think that honest self-scrutiny is essential to the development of sound moral agency. The point of moral self-knowledge is in coming to know what one is like in comparison with the moral law and the point of this normative frame is to develop objectivity and to bring the will into line with what respect for rational autonomy requires. Kant's insistence that duty frame moral self-knowledge is an implicit acknowledgement that practical identities (to use Korsgaard's language) are theory-laden forms of self-understanding that need to be counter-acted by the recognition that our humanity itself, our "moral identity", is a "source of reasons and obligations" (p. 129). Knowledge of our moral and immoral tendencies is an important part but not the whole, I will now argue, of a moral self-knowledge that will aid moral development.

5 Self-Knowledge and Moral Development

The honest shopkeeper of the *Groundwork* provides an example of a person whose will is less than perfect—he acts in accordance with duty but from a maxim of prudence. If he had moral self-knowledge he would recognize that his action was consistent with duty but motivated by self-interest. He would not, I have argued, use this fact about himself as a datum to rank his moral performance and he would not take moral credit for his action which, after all, accords with morality only because it is good for business and so is importantly a result of circumstantial pressures. Instead moral self-knowledge would point

him toward the requirements of duty. In this way the duty of moral self-knowledge demands that the theoretical ground of obligation be internalized in the moment of self-awareness. It is easy to overlook the importance of this aspect of the duty of self-knowledge. By limiting one's moral focus in this way Kant is restricting the scope of moral attitudes available to the agent in self-awareness and returning her attention to the requirements of duty. If focused on the question of whether he is respecting the autonomy of his customers the shopkeeper will have no cognitive space to indulge in narratives about the harsh realities of the business world, or the cold ingratitude of his customers, and his sense of what he is doing will be structured by and seen in relation to the requirements of duty. This active internalization of duty in self-assessment is neither easy nor a trivial part of moral practice. It is, in part, what helps to keep us honest. We can see, in cases of this sort, how Kant's use of casuistry as a truth-seeking practice challenges the agent to face the requirements of duty and leave self-conceit behind. In this he foreshadows Sartre's relentless critique of bourgeois morality.

But even if we agree with Kant (and my interpretation of his overly brief remarks about self-knowledge) that we should focus on the requirements of duty in order to avoid self-deception and its accompanying moral vices, we may wonder whether he has given a full accounting of moral self-knowledge and its effects on moral development. As described, will self-knowledge plausibly have the effects he supposes it to have? How will the shopkeeper be transformed by his awareness that his action doesn't measure up to the moral law? How does a clear-headed awareness of the impurity of one's will lead to moral development? It would be silly to suppose, of course, that Kant believed any single act of self-knowledge would have transformative effects, but we might yet puzzle over how awareness of the moral law, self-knowledge through the normative frame of duty, unsupported by moral emotions can bring about the changes he predicts. According to Kant (1991, AK 6:441–2):

> moral self-knowledge will, first dispel *fanatical* contempt for oneself as man (for the whole human race), since this contradicts itself. It is only through the noble predisposition to the good in us, which makes man worthy of respect, that one can find a man who acts contrary to it contemptible (the man himself, but not the humanity in him). But such knowledge will also counteract that *egotistical* self-esteem which takes mere wishes—wishes that, however ardent, always remain empty of deeds—for proof of a good heart....Impartiality in appraising oneself in comparison with the law, and sincerity in acknowledging to oneself one's inner moral worth or lack of worth are duties to oneself that follow directly from this first command of self-knowledge.

This short passage does not solve the puzzle. First of all it simply isn't clear how fanatical contempt for oneself will be diminished by knowledge of one's heart in relation to duty. Kant's claims here are underdeveloped; he seems to say that recognition of the moral law in me will dispel self-contempt. But this equates moral self-knowledge with knowledge of the moral law in me and the two are not equivalent, the former describes my particular and imperfect moral constitution the latter describes my awareness of pure practical reason in me. The prudentially motivated shopkeeper who sees that duty requires of him something he is failing to give is unlikely to thereby have less contempt for himself. Secondly, we can agree with Kant that one's heart should ultimately be judged by its maxims for action and not its pious ejaculations and ineffective wishes, and agree that there is a human tendency to let our psychic dramas influence our self-assessments, but challenge the claim that egotistical self-esteem will be counter-acted so directly. The rakehell's

problem, after all, is not that he fails to take into account what he has done, but that his negative self-judgement turns into moral self-indulgence. Again Kant seems to suppose that the moral law possesses remarkable powers for psychological transformation.

Kant is right to hold that knowledge of one's moral constitution is a necessary condition for moral development but wrong, I think, to suppose that knowing one's heart in relation to duty is sufficient for moral self-knowledge. What Kant's theory lacks, and cannot obviously provide, is an account of how having an accurate description one's moral constitution will make it possible for that constitution to progress toward moral perfection and moral objectivity. In short, it needs to establish that a way of knowing my heart (my moral constitution) is morally liberating in the sense that it allows me to be guided more completely by the moral law. Arguably any effective, systematic approach to self-scrutiny will require that evidence about one's heart be gathered within a theoretical framework of some sort. To gather a proper account of oneself, in order to avoid self-illusions, one must have in place a method for interpreting the data collected. I have suggested that Kant's insistence that duty serve as the normative frame within which self-knowledge is accumulated puts a greater burden on duty than it is able to bear (it does not obviously secure the psychological effects he supposes) even though it goes some distance to countering self-deception. Of course, for Kant, the moral law has sublime importance and the capacity to overwhelm the agent's self-conceit in the moment that it is brought in relation to the moral law. But this anthropological claim seems overly strong.

My diagnosis is that the basic problem of self-illusion and its tendency toward moral corruption requires a remedy more likely to harness or cultivate the emotional dispositions involved in self-delusion than simple, rigorous attentiveness to duty. When Kant (1991, AK 6:457) writes of the duty to sympathize actively in the fate of others he acknowledges that non-moral motives such as sympathy should be cultivated in order to help us to do what the representation of duty itself might not accomplish. Sound moral agency demands that emotional dispositions be directed in such a way that dutiful agency is enhanced and dutiful action is made more likely. Again, Kant is not psychologically naïve about any of this, acknowledging the importance of self-mastery and self-governance. So it is odd that he would suppose that duty could serve unassisted by emotional dispositions such as compassion (which he explicitly rejects as a requirement of duty) that could enhance objectivity. If the honest shopkeeper could see not only that he was failing to meet the requirements of duty, but at the same time recognize that the tendencies leading him away from duty toward the dear self are tendencies common in human beings, who deserve respect himself included, he would be better placed to take in and appropriately utilize that information, than if duty were the final word. But as we have seen, Kant is suspicious of all forms of positive affect toward oneself: the illusion of good in ourselves, but not others, must be wiped out without exemption.

The question of what is the correct frame for self-knowledge and whether it could be made consistent with Kant's ethics is a topic for another paper. I hope here to have made plausible the case for an account of self-knowledge that incorporates the awareness and cultivation of moral emotions. Such an account could be thought of more along the lines of self-regulation than a pure cognition (as has been argued by McGeer 2007). It is worth noting, however, that if my diagnosis of the problem is correct, the trouble for self-knowledge begins with Kant's overly negative account of human motives, an account which is not fundamental to his ethical theory. This somewhat ambivalent conclusion does not diminish the importance of Kant's insight into the value of self-knowledge in moral practice but it does suggest that there is more philosophical work to be done.

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